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A YEAR AMONGST THE INDIANS OF QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLAND; OR, AN OPEN FIELD FOR MISSIONARY LABOUR.

INTRODUCTION.

In an article in a former number of 'Mission Life' (vol. i, p. 222) an account was given of the work of Pastor Harms, a German clergyman, and of the manner in which he succeeded in infusing a Missionary spirit into the villagers under his charge, and how without any external aid he and his flock actually originated and supported a Mission on no insignificant scale. They trained their own Missionaries, selected from their own body colonists to accompany them; they built their own Mission vessel, and constantly recruiting their ranks from home, they founded one Mission after another until their stations numbered no fewer than twenty-four in the land of their adoption.

There are not many men like Pastor Harms—at least, not in their power of influence and organisation. But many in our own beloved land do not come one whit behind him in their deep and all-absorbing love for souls and wish to extend their Redeemer's kingdom upon earth. And why should not some one, at least, be found to emulate the noble example thus set to them? A high aim is the secret of success in all things. The arrow which is not pointed high can never reach the distant mark. Why should not some English village or district or congregation plant its Missionary colony in some heathen land? Half the indifference to Missionary efforts which prevails around us may be attributed to a want of reality, almost inseparable from the want of concentrated interest in particular spheres of work. The bare knowledge that 10,000 people are dying of starvation in some before almost unheard-of district of a distant land, does not create half the feeling of sympathy naturally excited by an acquaintance with all the particulars of a single instance of the lingering horrors of such a death. So in the case of those who are starving for lack of the bread of life. It is all very well to say that people should act upon principle, and not from feeling; but who shall say that it is not better to act from feeling rather than not act at all, or that many who begin to act upon lower motives may not end in acting on the highest? Who is there whose experience of his own actions and motives will not lead him to acknowledge, and that with the deepest thankfulness, the manner in which God's Providence has often turned

the dross of selfishness into the gold of a noble purpose? May God grant, for his dear Son's sake, that the appeal made in the following pages may not be in vain, but that the bread thus cast upon the waters may come back again, even though it be after many days.

The Indians on Vancouver Island and on the main-land of British Columbia are diminishing so rapidly by contact with the white people that in a very few years they must become very rare. I do not, therefore, propose to write much about them. *It is too late.* But the tribes on "Queen Charlotte Island" are much more numerous, and of a more noble race. The habits and characteristics of the one race do not differ much from those of the other—the causes which have had so fatal an effect in the one case will have the same effect in the other.

Queen Charlotte's Island is about 200 miles in length, and varies in breadth from 10 to 60 miles, with an area of 4000 square miles. About one tenth is rich land, so far as discovered; the interior is not known, being impassable owing to the abundance of very heavy timber. Game, fish, and fish oils, are obtainable in quantities sufficient to supply all the wants of the American Continent. There are magnificent and safe harbours. This island is divided by Queen Charlotte Sound from the main-land, the average width of the sound being about fifty miles.

The natives of "Queen Charlotte," named Skittagets, have been considered the finest specimen of the Indian race on the Pacific. They are naturally savage and warlike, but, at the same time, are quite disposed to be friendly with the "white settlers," and wish the latter to live amongst them. They are very ingenious, and apt to adopt the customs of civilised life. They are nearly as white as Europeans. They number about 4500.

Many are very degraded, though occasionally a few are to be met with who are very industrious, especially those who have for a short time visited the capital. I lived in the ranche of a family belonging to the "Strid-ga-tees" tribe, who were all generally employed at some handicraft, such as making carved ear-rings out of pieces of lead found on the shores after some wreck; cutting out pipes and flutes from a soft bituminous slate found in their neighbourhood. These are all beautifully carved and ornamented, and would do credit to a European mechanic. I have purchased two of these flutes for a dollar each. They are about eighteen inches long, in one piece, the extreme ends being inlaid with lead, giving one the idea of being "mounted in silver;"

the keys were stationary, and each represented a frog, of which the eyes were of lead. A better specimen of workmanship I never saw before nor since.

This same family had many curious images exquisitely carved out of wood and bone; their boxes and wooden kettles were inlaid with select shells and pearls gathered on the shores. These men had been to the capital for a few months, assisting in blacksmiths' shops. The majority of males and females are but slightly clad, their covering being a blanket, obtained from the Hudson's Bay Company. This is loosely thrown over their shoulders, more for the sake of warmth than from any sense of decency. The majority of them have a great dislike to hard labour. Sometimes, rather than take the trouble to go and hunt or fish for food, they will remain for several days without eating anything in the shape of food, and it is only when they are exhausted that they will crawl into their canoes and go fishing, existing for the most part on halibut, salmon, and shell fish, of which there are immense quantities to be found in small round cavities in the rocks on the shore all round the island. Crabs they do not like, though some of them eat them in quantities. There is a kind of spider-like crab frequently met with on the island (never seen in any other part of the globe); these the Indians will not touch.

At the close of the fishing season they dry the fish in the sun for food during the winter months; but, being such gluttons, they manage to run short several weeks before the commencement of the fishing season in the following spring, and have recourse to roots or bulbs, which they find a little way in the interior of the bush. Fish eaten in its dried state is very hard and tasteless; hence they dip the pieces in fish-oil, as we sometimes do bread in treacle or honey; and if they are without this oil they dip the pieces before eating into salt water, which certainly improves the taste. Many of the tribes collect large quantities of berries, which they also dry for the winter's provisions, but even with this additional stock they are always completely out of food in the spring.

Their personal appearance is not attractive. Intermarriage between the Indians and the whites is not uncommon. The offspring of the female half-breeds, especially, are really extraordinarily handsome, and many of these, if well dressed, would vie with the handsomest ladies seen any day in Regent Street during the fashionable season. These are facts incontestable to those travellers who have visited the half-breeds of British Columbia, and they pride themselves on their good

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"looks and figure." Not an unfavorable indication, perhaps, of the possibility of their future civilisation. I have long felt what a pity it is there are no Missionaries sent here to save those beautiful creatures from the awful fate that awaits them; it is but a few hundred miles from the capital, and yet there is no sympathy shown—no one sent amongst them to instruct them in the duties of religion, and the result is immorality of the most loathsome kind—such that were I to state only facts which I have been personally cognisant of, not once, but scores of times, I could not but be accused of falsehood.

A white man can purchase a wife for the value of six whole blankets, on the strange conditions that if he does not like her after a *month's trial* he can return her, and *demand back his blankets;* and if he declines to take the blankets, her family will keep them, and call him a very good man.

When an Indian takes a girl to wife, he keeps her till the age of twenty to twenty-five, and then returns her to the chief, who provides for her during the rest of her lifetime, and she undergoes the horrid mutilation of getting a canoe on her lip, as a sign of retirement from wedded life. A "canoe on the lip" means two pieces of ivory or bone, each the size of a halfpenny-piece; one is put on the top of the under lip, and the other underneath, and these are riveted together. Sometimes it will be one solid piece, causing the under lip to project out for a distance of at least an inch and a half from the under jaw. To this is sometimes added a large ring through the nose. I have seen them two and a half inches in diameter. Then they have three or four large holes in each ear, each large enough to allow the little finger to be inserted up to the second joint, in which she has either rings or strips of coloured rags. Many of them have rings round their wrists and legs immediately above the ankle. Sometimes these latter are put on when they are young; and as they grow up the rings will be so tight as to be invisible, owing to the flesh hanging over; nor do they seem to suffer any pain from it, though all walk very lame from this cause alone. Their breasts and arms are tattooed with figures representing chiefs and fish.

Many of the native women go down to Victoria during the winter and return in the spring loaded with blankets, beads, tobacco, fire-water, &c. These they distribute amongst their tribe in the following manner:—Perching themselves on a rock or stump, they will tear the blankets in strips, about eight inches in width, and throw them as far as they can in the crowd, to make a general scramble, and they who get the most gain the highest honours. Sometimes a woman will

make her husband a chief by this means; nor does she lose by thus throwing away everything she possesses, as a tribe will build her a house, and all the tribes, after a few months, will pay her a visit and make presents to her husband, the new chief, when he will have received more than double what had been previously thrown away.

The men are much disfigured, having rings through their noses and ears, their breasts and arms tattooed, and many of their bodies showing numerous marks, all over their person, of pieces of flesh having been bitten off in some savage ceremony. The more bite-marks he can show on his body, the greater the "brave." They are diminishing very fast, disease and smallpox sometimes carrying off hundreds in a single week in one tribe.

There are no "flat-heads" on these islands, flat-heads being confined to the main-land. The Queen Charlotte islanders say it is a very foolish custom, while those who adopt it think the opposite. The system adopted is to strap the heads on a board while the children are young, and sometimes simply to compress the head with a handkerchief. In one of my expeditions on the main-land, among the "Bella-bella" Indians, I met with a whole family having long, white, silky hair and pink eyes. One of the chiefs invited me to go and see them; they had very large heads, full faces, and clear white skin.

The Queen Charlotte islanders sometimes use barks and roots for sickness, but the most common medicine is salt water. For a long time I was at a loss to account for the quantity of water that lay about, till one day a chief asked me for the loan of one of my buckets, which he took down to the sea-side. After filling it, he there and then drank up all the water; and after retaining the same for about two hours, opened his huge mouth with little exertion, when out went about half the salt water, as if running from a hose. After waiting about ten minutes longer, with equal ease and unconcern he got rid of the remainder. This he called "washing himself inside out." It is a common practice amongst both sexes. It appears to me that this is the principal cause of so many deaths amongst the Indians during the last few years, particularly when they have the smallpox.

The Indians have many feasts during the year. In preparing themselves, they first wash the old paint off their hands and faces, and repaint figures of men, fish, and birds, with vermilion, which they purchase from the whites; also with a black stain, which they obtain from burnt wood. To make the colours stick to the skin, they first grease the same with fish grease, or candles if they have them; after

they have painted their hands and faces they grease their breasts, and then, over all, scatter fine down taken from the duck or goose. The men then squat down, and with sticks, which they hit one against the other, keep good time to the singing of both men and women, some of the latter at the same time dancing (?), by shaking and twisting about their heads and bodies in every possible shape and position, at the same time scarcely moving their knee-joints or legs. Sometimes a woman will throw in a new motion, accompanied with a little wit or slang, which will cause a very lively animation amongst the crowd, and encourage them to keep up the excitement for a whole day and night. The following is one of their most common songs:

"I, Ee, Ha; I, Ee, Ly-yah! ha oü ha ha la I, E, Hay:
[Repeat the above four times, and finish with—]
Chorus—I, Ee, Ha; I, E, Ha."

There are certain characteristics common to the Indians all along the Pacific coast, the style of the Mexican Indians and the Hydahs being very similar in many of their dances and habits.

The Indians of Queen Charlotte Island believe they were originally "Klay-e-Gulla-gulla" (Black Crows), hence the black paint; they have good memories, and often talk about Captain Cook having visited their forefathers at the head of the island.

All the Indians in this colony are passionately fond of gambling; but there are always a few in each tribe who are "experts," and I have always observed that these experts are the very worst and most dangerous of all Indians. In reforming Indians, it would be necessary to put a stop to this class, otherwise all religious instruction would be in vain.

What a splendid field there is on these islands for Missionary operations, if bravely and judiciously managed! Every man likes the world to know and see the good he has done. Here there is a rare chance—a clear field and no opposition. Without attempting to give any directions at length, I will venture to suggest here such a plan as I believe might be carried out successfully and cheaply. Let four Missionary members be appointed, and let them take out with them from England, say, fifty families, many of the younger branches being boys or young men, whose presence and numbers will prevent hostilities on the part of the Indians. Engage six young Canadian bushmen accustomed to the axe, and able to instruct the new settlers in building log-houses. On landing at Victoria they would apply for a free grant of land, say

fifty acres each (thir would be granted with pleasure by the Colonial Government) in "Skidgate Channel." The necessary tools and outfit could be purchased at Victoria more cheaply than in England. They would proceed to Skidgate Channel, select the best site for settling on, in the centre of which they would first erect a large square Mission-house. This could be built in a couple of days, and when completed all the families would take shelter there, and then commence to erect houses for each family, completing one house at a time. With all hands at work, in two months every family will have a house to themselves; then let B, C, D, &c., help A to dig or plough and seed ten acres of A's land; then A, C, D, &c., help B to do the same, and so on till all have ten acres planted and fenced off. This would take about three months to complete, and then every family would work alone and at his own time in future, while the four Missionaries would begin their labours amongst the Indians in the immediate neighbourhood; and as they favorably progressed and lightened the amount of work, one would remain, one go east and settle in Harriet Harbour, the third go south among the Indians of Gold Harbour, and the fourth settle amongst the Indians at the very head of the island. By this means there would be a connecting link between each Mission station, and easy communication with the nearest Mission station on the main land at Fort Simpson, accessible by canoe.

On the voyage out from England all could perfect themselves in the Indian language, a man of ordinary intelligence being able in a few days to make himself acquainted with the some 300 words which constitute the language.

Bush life sounds harsh and rough. But the amount of physical labour is no greater than involved in farming in England, the only difficulty being in cutting down timber with the axe; but this is easy and rather pleasant work after a month or two's practice (Canadian bushmen prefer the axe to any other farming tool).

It now only remains to be known the amount of funds necessary for each family (the Government might contribute, but independently of them). £40 for each family of say six members would be ample; and if they had not enough, the money might be safely advanced to them, the chief Missionary acting as banker or trustee; this money would pay the fare out, and leave sufficient in hand, on arrival at Victoria, to purchase outfit there, and once a month vessels would be sure to call at the stations for orders and to discharge goods. A family who have settled are always sure of getting credit, if required, their credit being

always considered the best and surest, being on the strength of their crops when taken to market. This is the way every poor settler gets on in a new country. I would recommend that every family should be members of the Mission, and give a little help when not otherwise engaged on farm work. Of such an expedition I should be only too glad to become an active member, doing my share of work.

In all kinds of transactions entered into with Indians it is absolutely necessary never to make a promise without fulfilling it strictly to the letter, and to insist upon their doing the same. By all means have no white man on the island for a single day to counteract the good which may be done. One bad man in a single day will undo the work of months; it would be, therefore, advisable, on the arrival of any ships, to keep an eye on the crew, *i. e.* a very close watch. If these instructions were carried out, Queen Charlotte's Island would become the most prosperous island in the Pacific within a few years. After the Mission members had settled there, say two years, then other families might be introduced from England.

There is nothing I should like better than being connected with such an enterprise, and I would freely give my knowledge and time for such a good purpose. The position of the island is good, and on the future Australian route; and a better prospect and brighter field does not present itself for a Mission, and for families seeking a future and independent home, than this said island at the present day.

It may be well also to say something about the quality of the land and its capabilities. In many parts it is rich, black, loamy, deep soil; while in others there is sandy prairie land, capable of producing the finest potatoes in the world (free from disease). I have seen them not uncommonly six inches in diameter, and all sound in the centre; while four inches diameter is the most common size—nice, dry, mealy potatoes. Soil that grow such can produce anything. The soil is such as to render manure unnecessary for many years. Good timber is now getting so scarce in Canada that the well-known Gilmor and Co. will have to begin operations in this colony; and here they will find abundance of the finest timber in the world for length and strength, being without joints or knots. A common specimen of the timber is used as a flag-pole at Kew Gardens, London.

To enter rather more fully into the particulars of the probable cost of maintaining a small Mission colony, and the cost per man or per family of so many:

A man with a family of six could be supported by one gun, fishing-

tackle, and a few acres of ground; for example, he could catch enough game and fish on a Monday morning to last all the week, and during the following days of the week could attend to his farm, the expenses of which would be only for seeds, tools, clothing, &c., which are to be had at the capital at London prices. Fish and game being so very plentiful, it is no hardship to obtain any quantity within a mile of where you start from. Girls from ten to fourteen could attend to the traps and fish-lines; one working for each family an hour each day would produce enough.

A man who does not work himself, or let any of his children, would find the cost of living about the same as in England. At the capital a merchant's clerk can live on twenty shillings per week. Missionaries, not having time to fish, hunt, or farm, could live in the farm districts at about six shillings per week per head, as they could buy enough fish and game from the Indians to last a week for the value of a few pins, tobacco, buttons, or say one shilling. Flour, potatoes, &c., could be bought from the farmers or at the capital at a less cost than in England. By trapping fur skins or trading with the Indians a large profit is to be made; for example, a bear-skin could be purchased from the Indians for about a shilling's worth of trinkets, and sold at the capital for four or five dollars.

I will only add a few words about the climate:—It is much milder than at Victoria; the summer not quite so warm; the winter much warmer, with less snow, but more rain. The winter of 1862-63, the Indians all say, was the "coldest in their recollections," yet the frost was never severe. The autumn is the most pleasant season of the year, being mild and dry. The temperature is never as low as 8° below freezing-point during winter, and higher than 80° in the shade during summer, with very little rain, often less than ten inches during the whole summer. I only once heard thunder and saw only two electrical discharges during twelve months, and they happened during the month of January.

NOTE.—If necessary I could supply a tracing of the island, and write out the language. Any questions I will with pleasure answer without delay.

F. P.